

The Lord of History

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Date: 11 January 2026

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[0 : 00] Our Scripture reading this morning is taken from the book of Daniel, and we're reading in Daniel chapters 11 and 12. I'm going to begin with verses 2 through 4 of chapter 11.

! Let's hear and read together from God's Word. Daniel 11 from verse 2. Now I will show you the truth.

Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece.

Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and do as he wills. And as soon as he is arisen, his kingdom shall be broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the authority with which he ruled.

For his kingdom shall be plucked up and go to others beside these. And then in verse 21 through to verse 31 of chapter 11, we read this.

[1 : 21] In his place shall arise a contemptible person to whom royal majesty has not been given.

He shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken, even the prince of the covenant.

And from the time that an alliance is made with him, he shall act deceitfully. And he shall become strong with a small people. Without warning, he shall come into the richest parts of the province.

And he shall do what neither his fathers nor his father's fathers have done, scattering among them plunder, spoil, and goods. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time.

And he shall stir up his power and his heart against the king of the south with a great army. The king of the south shall wage war with an exceedingly great and mighty army.

[2 : 26] But he shall not stand, for plots shall be devised against him. Even those who eat his food shall break him. His army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain.

And as for the two kings, their hearts shall be bent on doing evil. They shall speak lies at the same table, but to no avail. For the end is yet to be at the time appointed.

And he shall return to his land with great wealth. But his heart shall be set against the holy covenant. And he shall work his will and return to his own land. At the time appointed, he shall return and come into the south.

But it shall not be this time as it was before. For ships of Kittim shall come against him. And he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged, and take action against the holy covenant.

He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering.

[3 : 34] And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. And then in verses 40 through 45 of chapter 11 and into chapter 12, verse 3, we read these words.

Verse 4, He shall come to his end with none.

To help him. At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who is in charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.

But at that time your people shall be delivered. Everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above. And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. And then in verses 8 through 12.

[5 : 36] I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, O my Lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?

He said, Go your way, Daniel. For the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined.

But the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand. But those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away.

And the abomination that makes desolate is set up. There shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.

This is the word of God. And to his name be praise and glory. All right. Well, if you are today at least of the millennial generation or older, you will remember December 31st, 1999, Y2K, when so many Christians across the world were saying that the book of Revelation had come to pass.

[6 : 59] And by midnight that night, the computers would revert to 1900 because they couldn't compute 2000. And the planes would go down. And the stock market would crash.

And this wasn't just religious predictions. It was secularist predictions as well that sort of a post-apocalyptic era would begin, a Mad Max sort of environment.

And bunkers were built and charts were made. And none of it, of course, came to pass. And that is what we call apocalypticism. It's a spirit that wants to always think that we're living in the end.

The end is very soon. And every event that happens in the news is signaling the end that's about to come. And one of my favorite theologians is Abraham Kuyper. So trustworthy, so often.

But he said at the start of the Great World War in 1917, he said, this is surely the end of human history. And the early church said that during the persecutions.

[7 : 59] And the reformers said that during the time of the Reformation. And it's been said so many times. And it's still, of course, being said in our generation. And new charts are being written all the time to map out the end of the world.

One writer commenting on this, it's not just a religious thing. It's a secular thing as well. To always be thinking this must be the worst it's ever been. The end must be close.

We're about to bring it about. One writer says, When Christians feel like they're losing cultural influence and power, end-time speculation spikes dramatically. It's a narrative, the writer says, that makes sense of cultural loss.

So the more we feel defeated in our culture, the more people have end-time speculation. It tends to spike proportionally. So prophetic vindication. We reach, I should say, when we've experienced cultural defeat, we reach for prophetic vindication.

And we want to be vindicated. It's a way of gaining control of the narrative. If things are this bad, it must be the end. That's the only way we can figure this out and justify it. Now, Daniel 11 and 12.

[9 : 05] This is our last look at Daniel. This vision we've just read, packed full of information, is addressing exactly this habit, this human habit, to always think that things are about to end.

And it pulls together two great themes that have been woven throughout the whole book. So the very last chapter, we get to pull together a couple things that have been there the whole time, but we've not made so explicit.

And one of them, if you go back all the way to chapter 1, 605 B.C., the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, goes and he attacks Jerusalem, and he brings Daniel and many of the young professional class to Babylon to build a great city.

And he wants to Babylonize them. He wants to defeat them by enculturation. He wants them to become polytheist and pagan like him. And with that, in chapter 1, if you were here for many, many months ago for chapter 1, you'll remember that one of the big chorus lines throughout the chapter is, the Lord gave, the Lord gave, the Lord gave.

And it said the whole time, it's the Lord that put Daniel in Babylon. And so there's this echo throughout of God's sovereign hand at work in all of this. It felt like such cultural defeat, yet it was the Lord that put them there.

[10 : 21] The Lord sent them to Babylon. And so we learn one of the big themes throughout the book is, the God of the Bible, the real God, is the Lord of history. And that shows up very much in this fourth vision.

But then the other big theme of the book is that when you read, especially the first six chapters, these great stories, Daniel and the lion's den, the fiery furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel and his friends unwilling to eat the king's meat, drink the king's wine, yet they were stronger than everybody else.

How could it be? How could you survive a fiery furnace? How can you survive a lion's den? And we read there, yet there was one in the den, there was one in the furnace like a son of the gods. And so one of the big themes throughout the book is great reversals, that things feel bad.

It feels like cultural loss and defeat all the time in exile, but then there's a great reversal that comes through. And we learn in this final vision that the Lord of history is the God of great reversals.

And those two themes have been woven throughout the whole book, and they come together right here in this final vision. Now, as we read it, as David joked, this is one of the chapters in the Bible that is most full of information.

[11 : 32] There are 135 plus distinct prophetic utterances in chapter 11. And so we couldn't possibly unveil the historical picture in the 28 minutes or so that I have left.

So we have to ask, what does this mean for us? Let's get a big idea of what's going on here and then ask, what does it mean for us? And you know that the question throughout the whole book of Daniel has been, how do we live with faithfulness in the midst of exile?

Every Christian today is living in exile. We're living in the city of Babylon. We're living in a world of idolatries all around us all the time. And we've learned over and over again, be in the world but not of it.

Live with conviction but don't compromise. And then the question that comes through this specific vision is, how do you live faithfully through dark cycles of history without either panicking that every crisis means it must be the end of the world on the one hand, or thinking God must have lost control on the other hand?

So how do you live faithfully in exile through dark cycles of history? That's what this vision is really about. So let's think about it. First, God teaches us here about the fact that there's a pattern to history.

[12 : 47] We might call it the long defeat. And then secondly, God breaks in with a great reversal. And then finally, I'll just give you one reason why this matters for you today.

Okay. So first, we learn in this vision that there is pattern, a pattern to history. The biblical vision of history comes with a pattern.

Now in the very end of chapter 10 into the first part of chapter 11, there's an angel, a messenger on the bank of the Tigris River. And the messenger is speaking to Daniel.

And the messenger says, I'm going to open for you the book of truth. Now this is a book, a reference to what only God knows in heaven. So Daniel's being given here a vision of what only God knows, the Lord of history.

And the text proves it because this is 536 BC. And we're given 35 verses of predictive prophecy covering 370 years that would follow, 536.

[13 : 47] And the big issue with this text is just how precise the prophecy is and how much it came true. And so lots of people question the historicity of the text when it was written because it's so precise, because it's so clear, because the predictions that were made here actually did come to pass.

And nobody really debates that. And so if you look down at verses 2 to 4, you'll see a couple mentions of some of the great prophecies that have come to pass. Behold, the second sentence says, three more kings will arise in Persia.

So in verse 2, you get a reference to the kings of Persia, and a fourth will be richer than all of them. Now that fourth, who gets three words, is the famous king Xerxes, who faced Leonidas at Thermopylae.

Lots of movies have been made about that battle. And it's just a brief mention. And then right after that, in verse 2, 3, I should say, Then a mighty king will arise after the kingdom of Greece is stirred up, who shall rule a great dominion and do as he wills.

That's Alexander the Great, the mighty king that arose out of Greece, one of the most important people in all of human history. And he gets a clause. And then in verse 4, I should say, right after that, As soon as that, his kingdom will be broken, and it will be scattered to the four winds to those who are not his children.

[15 : 06] And that's because Alexander the Great's kingdom was scattered amongst four generals to the four winds. And so there, in three verses, you've got some of the most important people in all of human history.

And they get a few words each. And it's just a breath. It's just a vapor that they pass through here in this prophecy. And you cover about 200 years of history that's going to follow the book of Daniel.

And that means that this book is God's vision of history, focusing in ways that the news would never focus on. You know, if the news was writing this, Alexander the Great would get all the airtime.

But instead, there's a focus on the little flock. You see, there's a mention throughout of the glorious land, Jerusalem, right at the middle. And all the saga and all the drama and all the movement is all centered on the relationship all these different kings have to the glorious land.

And so in part two of this history, verses 5 to 20, we read some of it. There's a long saga, geopolitical, of the kings of the north fighting against the kings of the south.

[16 : 11] And these are two of Alexander's generals that have taken over Egypt and Syria. The Seleucid family in the north and the Ptolemies in the south. You've probably heard of the Ptolemies.

And there's Seleucid kings like Antiochus the first and Antiochus the second and so on and so forth. And the Ptolemies, Ptolemy the first, Ptolemy the second, and so on and so forth.

And if you were to read those 15, 17 verses, it is chronicling the real life history of the saga that went back and forth between them. And Jerusalem was caught up in the middle between them.

And so Jerusalem gets attacked so often because of the battles between the kings of the north and the kings of the south. There's poison. There's trying to marry into each other's families to make peace.

None of it ever works. It's a real Hatfield and McCoys situation. And at the end of that, in verse 21, the third period of history we're given is this reference to this one that would arise out of the north called the contemptible person.

[17 : 11] And we've learned about him already in Daniel. And he is Antiochus Epiphanes. And he comes to Jerusalem in 170 A.D. And he inflicts unprecedented horror on Jerusalem, one of the great holocausts of the Jewish people, actually.

And more than 80,000 people are murdered in his first attack on Jerusalem. And the text moves on, and you can read it in places like verse 31 where it says, He stopped the daily sacrifices, He plundered the temple, He profaned the temple.

And the text refers to that as the abomination that makes desolate, the abomination of desolation. Now, Antiochus Epiphanes, he went into the temple in Jerusalem in 167.

He slaughtered a pig in the Holy of Holies. He dedicated the temple to Zeus, which is the text references subtly there. And he outlawed biblical religion. And so anybody that got caught with a scroll or trying to go to synagogue or come to worship the real God in any way was executed publicly.

And so this is what's called the abomination of desolation in the Old Testament. And it's repeated. You may remember that line from the New Testament. Jesus references it. It's this horrible moment in the history of Jerusalem and the Jewish people, one of the great holocausts of their history.

[18 : 33] And if you were a Jewish person in the second century BC, 167, and this was happening to you, and everybody was being publicly executed around you, you would have said, this must be the time of the end.

And what this prophecy is doing is going out of its way to say, this is all going to happen. And you've got to seal this book and open it at the right time to let the people know this is not the time of the end.

And so you can see that in verse 27, for the end is yet to come, yet for the time appointed. Verse 35, the time of the end, even after all that Antiochus Epiphanes does, is still awaited.

And so the chorus line throughout the chapter is clear that Daniel is writing this vision for the people that were to come to know that when all this horror takes place, it's not yet the time of the end.

And then the last and final period of history that's referenced here, and we'll be finished with the history lessons for today, is in verses 36 to 45. Now, in verse 36 to 45, we read a portion of it.

[19 : 38] Something changes, and the historians cannot locate these prophecies in history at all. It's not about Antiochus anymore. The details don't match how he died, what happened in his life.

And it says things like in verse 37, this new Antiochus will come, and he will magnify himself above every god. And then verse 40, it's called the time of the end.

Now, all the commentators are clear throughout Christian history, it's been said over and over again, verse 36 to 45 is about something that has not happened yet. And that means what we're reading about here is a prophecy of the end of human history, the time of the end that has not yet come.

And there's so much mystery there, I can't possibly explain the verses, because they reference something that has yet to happen in world history. And Jesus uses exactly this language in Matthew 24 to say, look for the abomination of desolation in Jerusalem again, which would take place in AD 70 when Rome sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple.

But he says, but not even that will be the time of the end. And so what we learn about here is that this prophecy is giving us this idea that there are patterns in human history, cycles.

[20 : 51] What is the pattern? What is the vision pointing us to? And the pattern of a biblical worldview of human history is that there are cycles and cycles and cycles of violent kings and bad empires rising and falling.

And God's people are always getting caught in the middle in different nations, in different places. And there will be suffering over and over again that makes you think, surely this must be the last generation.

Surely this must be the end. But it's not. You don't know. And the pattern repeats. And Antiochus comes back in different forms. And Jesus teaches that in the New Testament. And that's why the New Testament says there have been many antichrists.

And there will be many more. This is a vision of the fact that this keeps going and going and going. And in the Lord of the Rings series, J.R. Tolkien, he was a Christian and a theologian in his own right.

And he talks about, he gives into the mouth of the elves this language of the long defeat. And it's his version in the lore of the Lord of the Rings of explaining this biblical vision of the patterns of history.

[21 : 57] And this is how the elves talk about it. They say that they know that they can't stop, quote, the fading of their world in this age. Evil keeps rising. And Sauron, the great evil in the Lord of the Rings.

He was defeated before, but he comes back again. And they'll defeat him again, they know. And yet something else will arise that will capture the elves, attack the elves again.

And they say it's a long, slow rearguard action. But then here's one of their leaders, Galadriel says, and this is really Tolkien's theology coming through. They fight on, not because they think they'll win in this age, in this decade, in this generation, but because fighting faithfully is right.

Because small deeds of kindness and courage matter even in the long defeat. Because even the wise, the very wise, cannot see all the ends that are coming.

Now, you see, in other words, what Tolkien's pointing us to is what Daniel's vision points us to. And that is that there are two wrong ways of responding to dark cycles of history, the long defeat.

[23 : 02] What feels like cultural loss, what feels like you're living in an exile and you're never come out of it, where the ministry fruit does not come. There's two wrong responses. One of them is the secularist narrative, secular progressivism that told us in the 19th century that we are moving to a better world, a better life.

Secularist versions of utopia and Marx and Rawls and Nietzsche and so many others gave us all sorts of different visions for how the more we learned, the better we got, the more we would progress and we would realize a society that had finally reached an end, a utopia, a place of real peace.

And of course, that's a myth. It never happened. It never came. It's not going to. And we entered instead into the bloodiest century of world history. But the other mistake that can be made is religious triumphalism.

On the one hand, always thinking that the end of time is near. On the other hand, when religious folks, when Christians sometimes say, if we could only win the culture, everything would be okay.

We could usher in the kingdom. And if we could get the right people in political power, if we could get the right emperor, if we could have a Constantinian mentality. Obviously, verse 14 in the middle of this warns us about this.

[24 : 20] It says, The violent among your own people will rise up and lift themselves up in violence to fulfill the vision, to bring about the end times, but they will fail. And so we've tried this so many times throughout world history.

And the text is calling us to something very distinct, very plain, very simple. And it's saying that the real key is to say, I don't know what God is up to.

I don't know when the end of the world is going to come. And I'm called, we're called to be a faithful presence in the place that we are. And to let the Lord be the Lord of history.

And so there are different forms of Christian nationalisms that are arising across our world right now that are making the same mistake all over again of religious triumphalism. And instead, we're called to a faithful presence in the midst of what feels like, the long defeat.

There's an old black spiritual in the U.S., in the southern U.S., the American South, called He's an On-Time God. And the lyrics go like this.

[25 : 25] He's an on-time God. Yes, he is. Job said it. He may not come when you want him, but he'll be there right on time. You can ask the children of Israel trapped at the Red Sea by that old mean Pharaoh and his army.

They had water all around them and Pharaoh on their track. And from out of nowhere, God stepped in and put a highway just like that. He's an on-time God. He may not come when you expect, but he is an on-time God.

And that's exactly what Daniel is saying. He said, let God be the Lord of history. And he is. Now, that's our long point. We have two short points. Secondly, but that's not the end of the story.

And the end of the story is that even in this vision, God breaks in. The Lord of history becomes the God of the great reversal. And if you look with me at chapter 12, just verses 1 to 3, especially verse 2.

Now, the commentators tell us, the theologians tell us, that this is verse 2.

[26 : 39] Chapter 12, verse 2 is the clearest statement of the resurrection, the second coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead in the whole of the Old Testament.

And so in the midst of these cycles and patterns of history and what feels like the long defeat, all of a sudden the angel, the messenger breaks in and prophesies the clearest example in the Old Testament of the resurrection of the dead, that many shall arise from the dust and they'll shine like stars in the heavens.

And here it is, the great reversal. And there are so many, you see, life can oftentimes feel like the long defeat, especially as a Christian. But there is the great reversal that is to come in world history, the resurrection of the dead.

And there are lots of many reversals that we experience in the cycles of history. And we call those revivals. And you see, God uses this pattern of what feels like a long defeat, but then he breaks in with a revival.

And it's a shadow. It's a picture of what he's doing across the whole of human history. What feels like a long defeat, this Antichrist we've read prophesied in verse 40 to 45, but then the resurrection of the dead will come.

[27 : 49] Now, how do you know today, how can you live today on the basis of that reality? See, what this vision is calling you to do at the end of the book of Daniel is to live your life on the basis that the great resurrection of the dead will actually take place.

And how do you do that? How can you know? Imagine that you are four years old. And I'm thinking through the lens of my children, so I'm able to pull out illustrations like this.

Imagine you're four years old. Do you remember that? Five years old, maybe. And you are told by your parents, we're going to have a great holiday at the seaside very soon. And you, as a four-year-old, as a five-year-old, you just do not have the capability to go and check the receipts on that, to be sure.

You can't go check the booking confirmations on your dad's email. You know, you're not looking at the bank statements to know, has a deposit been made? You're not looking at any itineraries that are written up on a spreadsheet.

No, what do you do? What is the firm basis of the reality of your hope that this is going to happen? And you're living for it, and you're enduring school just to get to the holiday at the seaside.

[29 : 04] And what is the basis? And the basis is that your parents have told you things over and over again that have created trust. And so you believe them. What kind of a receipt can you have but trust?

And so what do you do? Do you get your bucket and spade, and you start playing in the back garden, pretending you're already there, and you start drawing pictures of yourself at the seaside until you await the day that it finally comes?

What receipt do you have to live today on the basis that in the dark cycles of history, the great resurrection of the dead will actually take place and be the meaning of your life forever?

What receipt do you have? Now, we've read here about all these cycles, 13 kings in that second period of violence that will arise. And God is telling us, Jesus tells us in Matthew 24, this is how history works, and then the great reversal.

Many great reversals, and then the great reversal. And what receipt do you have? It's because in this cycle of violent kings, the truest king, the truest king, he came to earth not with a great army, not riding upon a mighty steed but on a donkey, and he came in great humility in the middle of history.

[30 : 19] He broke, he came to break the cycle. He came to break the cycle of the long defeat. He came to break the cycle of empires of violence, one after another.

And the Lord of history did that by becoming the ultimate victim of history. The Lord of history, he became the victim of history. You see, at the cross of Christ, the weight of all the evil that has taken place across all the cycles of dark patterns of this world, it crashed upon him.

He bore it in himself. He suffered in ways our eyes could not see, in ways that we could never understand, bearing the weight of the evil events of this world.

And on Sunday morning, he was not in the grave anymore. On Sunday morning, the tomb was empty. You see, the Lord of history became the victim of history.

But on Sunday morning, there was a great reversal. He was not there anymore. And because of that, you can know that the lengthy cycles of history, of political violence, he has broken it.

[31 : 23] You've got a receipt, you see. The receipt is that you can trust the God who raised Jesus from the dead in the middle of history to raise you from the dead at the end of history. And that means that when the text says that the book of life, boy, is your name written in the book of life?

That's what the text asks of us here. When you say, I trust him, I follow him, I am his disciple, your name, the Lamb's book of life, John calls it in the apocalypse of John, your name is there, and that means that you can have hope in the great resurrection that is to come.

Look, it gives you the power today to step back out into the world and say, my life matters so much. Let me finish with this. Let me give you one way this great reversal, this great prophecy, that the Lord of history is the God of great reversals, changes our life as we step out of this building this morning, how it matters now.

If your name is written in the book of life, as is mentioned here in verses 1 to 3, if you trust the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, everything changes because you know that the long defeat is not the end of the story, that the great reversal is coming, and that gives you the power to live faithfully in the midst of dark times.

Let me focus on one verse. Daniel 12 verse 3, the angel says, and those in the day of the great resurrection, those in the day of the great resurrection, those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

[33 : 03] Now, did you hear that? It said, those who turn many toward righteousness will shine in that day like stars forever and ever.

Now, here's why the embodied resurrection at the end of history makes sure life matters so much today. He's telling us because of the resurrection, because God is restoring this world, those who have trusted in the Lamb, their name written in the book of life, and those who have turned many to righteousness will shine forever.

Their work will shine forever. The turning of many to righteousness. What does that mean? And what it means here, I think, is something like this. Daniel says, how long will all this take place?

And there's some language there about how long the rule of Antiochus epiphanies will last at the end of the book. But then the angel says to Daniel, go your way, Daniel, till the end, and you will stand.

You will find rest. Daniel is not going to see any of the good stuff take place here. He's going to die in exile. He's going to die in the midst of the long defeat.

[34 : 13] But he says, go your way, Daniel. Keep doing what you're doing. Keep being faithful. Even if it feels like you're losing every single day, keep being faithful, and you will stand.

You will find your rest. You will shine like a star. Those who turn many to righteousness will shine like stars. What is the text telling us? It's telling us that your every waking hour today in this life means so much for eternal life.

That when you turn people to righteousness in this life, it shines in the next life. That what you do in every conversation, what you do at work every day, what you do in your interactions with your neighbors, what you do at the dinner table, matters so much for all of eternity because he's saying turn many to righteousness.

Keep doing what you're doing. Faithful presence in the midst of exile. It matters so much. I don't know if you know, you probably do know the story of Cologne Cathedral, which was started in the 13th century, the year 1248.

And Cologne Cathedral, the last stone was laid in Germany in the year 1880. So it took 632 years to build Cologne Cathedral. Why don't we make buildings like that anymore?

[35 : 30] And it's been noted by so many historians that the first generation knew that they would never see the finish, and the second generation knew, and the third generation knew, and the fourth generation knew that they would never see the finish.

But we know that so many, even of the first generation stone workers, carved beautiful images into stones that were put into Cologne Cathedral that no one can see.

And that was the plan from the beginning. There are so many stones that are intricate that can't be viewed by a human anymore because of the way they're placed. Only God can see them. You see, every single worker knew that they were laying a stone that nobody else would see yet.

They did it to God's glory. And you don't go out into the city building the kingdom. Ultimately, only God can do that. Ultimately, only God can usher in the end of history.

Only He can perfect the cathedral. But every moment you turn somebody to righteousness, you lay a stone, even if nobody sees it, to the glory of God.

[36 : 32] Every moment you volunteer to teach kids Sunday school on a day like this, and the kids just don't seem to pay attention for one second, you have laid a stone that only God understands, that you won't see the completion of somehow, some way.

And every time you have quiet integrity to pursue what's good in a hostile work environment, even if you're hurt by it, even if nobody else sees it, you're laying a stone.

And when you invite a neighbor to church for the tenth time, and they've said no every single time, they've ignored you every single time, but you're steady, you're laying a stone, and you don't know what cathedral God is building out of that.

He will, and when you make great art in your life, and you do good work to the glory of God, you're laying a stone, you're witnessing. And when you witness with courage, you speak words of the gospel to somebody, and you don't know what it's going to cost you, you're laying a stone.

You are witnessing to the glory of the light that will shine in the new Jerusalem, and you don't know all the ways God is going to use it because of the long defeat. It may feel like loss, but God is the God of great reversals.

[37 : 41] He's going to use it somehow, some way. And so, when you are raised up on that last day, on the day of the resurrection, you will see, you will see. Here's what Daniel teaches us, our last line of this book.

When you are raised up on the last day, you will see that living for Jesus Christ holistically mattered so much. It really did. And faithfulness and exile was worth every moment.

So, the Lord of history is the God of great reversals, so be in the world, but not of it. Go out into our great city and seek its peace. That's the invitation. Let us pray.

Father, we want to learn the faithfulness of Daniel in the midst of exile, even when we don't ever see great victories, we don't ever see huge fruit, we don't ever see revival, and Lord, we long for the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection.

So, Lord, teach us to be faithfully present in our time, in our moment, in whatever ways you've called us to be, to do great work, to make great art, to do great business to your glory, to ultimately witness to the gospel with words, Lord, to build stones, lay stones in the cathedral that you are ultimately building.

[38 : 58] And so, we thank you, Lord, that you use us. We feel convicted of our emptiness, our lack of holistic witness in this city for you. And so, we come today to be renewed in that.

We long to change. So, Lord, as we sing our closing hymn, we ask that you would change us, and we pray for that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.